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ABSTRACT

The Curry and Arnaud model for role playing is described and discussed as it relates to nutrition education for young children. The components of the model are: (1) developing the role, (2) using thematic content, (3) displaying feelings (in socially acceptable ways), (4) distinguishing between reality and fantasy, and (5) forming interpersonal transitions. To exemplify each component of the model, specific examples of activities from "Nutrition in a Changing World," a new curriculum developed by nutritionists and educators at Pennsylvania State University, are given. Role play is briefly discussed as a valid technique for teaching nutrition to young children. (Author/SE)

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ROLE PLAY IN NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

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"You can be a banana!" says Angelo as he hands one to Leslie, "And I will be a television guy who tells about you. I'll say you taste sweet and good."

"Say I'm yellow, too," smiles Leslie.

"You are a yellow banana and full of vitamin C," Angelo announces spreading his hands on the word, "full."

"That's me," laughs Leslie as she skips around in a circle. "A banana! a banana!"

Nutrition and Role Playing

Children are learning nutrition through the technique of role playing. This is one of the educational methods used in the new curriculum, Nutrition in a Changing World, developed by nutritionists and educators at The Pennsylvania State University and funded by The National Nutrition Foundation.

Role playing is an important method because it is closely associated with evolving thought processes and language in development--both oral and written. The process of role playing requires children to develop and expand upon roles, to explore and gain mastery over the world of objects and ideas and to demonstrate flexibility in their thinking.

Role playing is a "thought-builder" for youngsters as they concentrate and focus their attention on a concept.

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Imagine the children, each wearing a picture of a hard or soft food, and moving as they act out the following to "Ring Around the Rosy":

Ring around the hard foods
Ring around the soft foods
Soft foods, soft foods
Soft foods fall down!

Rind around the hard foods
Rind around the soft foods
Hard foods, hard foods
Hard foods fall down!

Ring around the hard foods
Ring around the soft foods
Hard foods, soft foods
We all fall down!

Marbach, Plass and Hsu (1978)

Role playing can be a device for teaching awareness of food texture and consistency:

> Suppose that the children have been comparing the feel of certain foods in their fingers and mouths and the teacher asks each to be or role play:
>
> mashed potatoes--the children may "scrunch up"; lie in a hump; stick together.
>
> an apple--the children may stand at attention; use their arms to show that they are round.
>
> Marbach, et al. (1978)

A Model for Role Playing

Curry and Arnaud (1974) noted several components to a role playing model. These components are: (1) developing the role, (2) using thematic content, (3) displaying feelings, (4) distinguishing between reality and fantasy, and (5) forming interpersonal transactions. All of these components are aimed at the intellectual, social and motor growth of the child as well as toward learning.

A. Role Development

Developing the role is demonstrated by the way young children perceive, enact, and then express their roles. Being a "mommy" and going grocery shopping, cooking for baby in the housekeeping corner and growing lima beans like a farmer give children the experiences that in turn help them to develop roles connected with nutrition. These experiences help children develop role models and perceptions of these and other roles.

B. Thematic Content

The second component of role playing is called "using thematic content." As the children perceive, gather, and express roles, the thematic content is observed by watching what they do in the context of the roles being portrayed. Stated another way, thematic content is what children do and say to themselves or others in performing the role play.

> While interacting with a teacher-operated puppet, that is, role playing the puppet's friends, the children will demonstrate their skills in multi-sensory food identification by helping the puppet find the food that is green, crunchy and smells fresh by testing different foods as the puppet asks them questions. (In this interaction the children are free to argue with the puppet, tease the puppet, tell him/her the right or wrong answer, pose their own questions, etc.)
>
> Marbach, et al. (1978)

The immediate social and emotional experiences connected with the puppet show provide motivation and determine the thematic content of the youngsters' play. Thematic content of the young child's role play is often brief, perhaps based upon today's snack such as "I'm a little jello cube. See me wiggle? I'm strawberry." Or "This (a piece of celery) is a space ship carrying cottage cheese to the moon. Zoom!" This spontaneity in role play is a valid learning tool for the young child.

C. Expressing Feelings

The third component of role playing is "displaying feelings." Here the basic idea is to see that the child channels his/her feelings in socially acceptable ways that are also nutritionally sound. A child, through role play, shows how he/she feels about an idea. The feeling can be projected in a direct or indirect manner. Sometimes a structure such as a mini play is needed to encourage the display of feelings.

> In the following instance the children are engaged in a play about root foods. The nutritional concept is that we eat root foods. They not only role play the parts in the play but also display their feelings, as they see and taste many root foods for the first time.

The Roots Family
A Play

Marbach, et al. (1978)

Cast:

The Roots Family	The Beaver Family
Carrot	Agatha
Rutabaga	Igor
Turnip	
Onion	
Potato	
Leek	
Scallion	
Radish	
Beet	
Parsnip	

ENTER AGATHA: Igor! Igor Beaver!

ENTER IGOR: What is it, Agatha?

AGATHA: Let's go for a walk, Igor. We can go down the road and visit our new neighbors, the Roots Family.

IGOR: O.K., let's go.

(Agatha and Igor walk down the road. They keep looking around.)

AGATHA: Where's their house, Igor? I don't see it anywhere.

IGOR: I don't know, Agatha. Where could it be?

(From the bottom of the stage, Carrot pops up.)

IGOR: Gasp!! Who are you?

CARROT: I'm Carrot. I'm one of the Roots family. We just moved in.

AGATHA: We've been looking for your house. We wanted to come and visit. I'm Agatha Beaver and this is my brother, Igor Beaver.

CARROT: This is my house. You're standing on my roof.

IGOR: What? Your roof? I thought this was the ground.

AGATHA: Are you trying to tell us that you live under the ground?

CARROT: Of course! Don't you?

IGOR: No. Our house is above the ground.

CARROT: Well, we live under the ground. Would you like to meet my brothers and sisters?

AGATHA: Oh, yes. We'd love to!!!

CARROT: All you Roots, come up here!!!

(Up pops Rutabaga.)

CARROT: This is my sister, Rutabaga.

AGATHA: She doesn't look like your sister. She's round and yellow!

RUTABAGA: You're right. Just wait until you see the rest of us Roots.

(Up pops Turnip.)

CARROT: This is my brother, Turnip.

IGOR: He's round and purple and white!

(Up pops Onion.)

CARROT: This is my sister, Onion.

AGATHA: Oh! You're round and yellow too. But not the same yellow as Rutabaga.

(Up pops Potato.)

CARROT: This is my brother, Potato.

IGOR: You're different too!

(Up pops Leek and Scallion.)

CARROT: These are my sisters, Leek and Scallion.

AGATHA: You're both green and white but Scallion is smaller.

(Up pops Radish and Beet.)

CARROT: These are my brothers, Radish and Beet.

IGOR: You two are red and round. Beet's bigger.

(Up pops Parsnip.)

CARROT: This is my sister, Parsnip.

AGATHA: You look like Carrot but you're white!!

CARROT: Now you've met my family - the Roots.

IGOR: You're all different and very interesting. You're all Roots and you all live underground.

AGATHA (TO THE CHILDREN IN THE AUDIENCE): Let's say each Roots name together as each Root takes a bow. The Roots family are:

AUDIENCE & CAST:

Carrot	Leek
Rutabaga	Scallion
Turnip	Radish
Onion	Beet
Potato	Parsnip

Young children become so engrossed in a play, such as "The Roots Family" that they loose their identities momentarily by actually believing that they are the vegetables and only thinly disguise themselves in the process. The impact of seeing, tasting and role playing Rutabaga, for example, enables the child to experience this food with more feeling than simply hearing about it from the teacher or reading about it. Rutabaga has become a real experience for the child. Even the children in the audience, who will later take their turns in role playing the characters, are moved by what they see and hear in the drama.

D. Fact and Fantasy

In distinguishing between fact and fantasy, the fourth component, the children should recognize the difference between what is imagined and what is real. Distinguishing between fact and fantasy is important in role playing because youngsters need to acquire this skill before they can understand the science aspects of nutrition.

In "The Orange Root Story" there are elements of fantasy, such as the carrot seed's ability to think, the carrot being so big that it would feed a whole family for lunch, and the carrot being both handsome and happy (human characteristics). However, the story also contains facts such as carrot seeds grow underground, need water, are identified by their leaves, grow from seeds, and are eaten by people. As the children role play this story they become aware of the carrot process from the seed to the table. To reinforce the facts connected with this root food, the teacher asks the science-oriented questions accompanying the story rather than fantasy questions, such as "How did the orange root feel as he grew underground?" Any discussion, too, would center around the separation of fact from fantasy.

The Orange Root Story

Marbach, et al. (1978)

Once upon a time a carrot seed was blowing, blowing in the wind. The wind stopped and the carrot seed fell to the ground. It bounded along until it fell into a little hole.

"I'm a little carrot seed.
I live underground.
I'll grow real big,
But I won't make a sound."

It began to rain little, tiny drops of rain. The carrot seed's hole filled up with water. The carrot seed was happy in the water.

"I'm a little carrot seed.
Water me, water me.
So I can grow,
Bigger than you know."

The carrot seed began to grow a big orange root down under the ground. Soon a green stem pushed up above the ground for everyone to see. From the green stem grew green leaves. A little girl stopped by to see. She didn't hear the carrot say:

"I'm a big carrot root,
I live underground.
I'll grow real big,
But I won't make a sound."

The little girl was hungry. She knew that the plant was a carrot plant. She could tell by the shapes of the leaves. She grabbed the stem in her hand and pulled. Up popped the big, orange root.

The little girl carried the carrot home and showed it to her mother.

"How wonderful!" said her mother. "This carrot is so big it will feed our whole family for lunch."

"Let's plant another seed to take its place," said the little girl.

The orange root who was now a very handsome carrot said happily,

"I was a little carrot seed.
I lived underground.
I grew real big,
But I didn't make a sound."

Teacher's Questions:

(a) Where does the carrot grow? (Acceptable: underground)

(b) How did this vegetable start? (Acceptable: seed)

(c) What part of the carrot do people eat? (Acceptable: root)

E. Interpersonal Transactions

The last component of role playing is called "forming interpersonal transactions." This consists of defining and assigning roles followed by acting them out. This component refers to the way that children relate to one another in a group setting. Role playing requires children to become aware of group relationships, to develop ideas about a generalized "other," and to feel empathy for one another. These key ingredients make role playing possible.

When these ingredients are understood, children will show feelings of interpersonal transactions through exclusion and inclusion. Defining group membership based upon those who can and can't play is role playing by exclusion. Defining group membership upon the understanding that all of the children's ideas extend and enrich the play of the group is role playing by inclusion.

An example of role playing by exclusion is the following:

> While reenacting the story, "The Little Red Hen," the children will indicate that they know the ingredients of bread and who didn't help the hen by role playing the bread-making process and having each animal either leave or help the little red hen in a special way.

Other examples of interpersonal transactions might involve table manners at a tea party, planning a variety of foods to be served for snack time and developing rules needed at a birthday party in the classroom.

Role Playing and Learning

Role Playing can be a valuable educational tool in teaching nutrition to young children because it gives them the needed practice in certain types of behaviors. Cooper and Go (1976) Simple nutrition problems can be solved through role playing. Moore (1975) Awareness of foods can happen by leaving real foods or food models in the housekeeping corner of a classroom for children to experiment with. Childrens' spontaneous play with these foods or models is one form of learning. Almy (1968)

Children need to rehearse the new nutrition skills they have learned in order to refine them and internalize them. Caldwell and Yowell (1977) That is what role playing is all about. Role playing is not just play. It is a complex educational tool that intensifies experiences for the young child and increases the probability that learning will occur.

Summary

In Nutrition in a Changing World, developed at Penn State University, the young child is expected to role play nutrition as a part of this new curriculum. Role playing has many advantages as an educational technique. It builds thoughts, facilitates flexible thinking, promotes awareness, provides opportunities for practicing food-related behaviors, and extends the time for refining new ideas.

The Curry and Arnaud model for role playing was described and discussed as it relates to nutrition education. The components of the model are: 1) role development, 2) thematic content, 3) display of feelings, 4) reality versus fantasy and 5) interpersonal transactions. Specific examples of activities from the new curriculum, Nutrition in a Changing World, were given to exemplify each component of the model for role play. In this article role play is discussed as one of the valid techniques for teaching nutrition to the young child.

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